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SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF RURAL MINORITY GROUP YOUTH.

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SPANISH AMERICAN RURAL YOUTH ARE SERIOUSLY HANDICAPPED BY A COMPLEXITY OF PROBLEMS, SUCH AS GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION, CULTURAL FACTORS, LOCAL ECONOMIC DEPRESSION, AND OUT-MIGRATION TO CITIES. ECONOMIC LIMITATIONS COMBINED WITH THE ISOLATION OF THESE PEOPLE TEND TO PERPETUATE HEALTH PROBLEMS. USUALLY, MEDICAL FACILITIES ARE NOT READILY AVAILABLE, AND WHERE THEY ARE, IN MANY CASES THE PEOPLE ARE UNABLE TO AFFORD THEM. MANY OF THESE YOUNGSTERS BECOME SCHOOL DROPOUTS, AND, CONSEQUENTLY, EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES WHICH ARE VIRTUALLY NONEXISTENT, ARE LIMITED EVEN FURTHER. RURAL SCHOOLS, FOR THE MOST PART, HAVE FAILED TO DEVELOP PROGRAMS WHICH ADEQUATELY PREPARE THESE YOUTH FOR THEIR RELATION TO THE GREATER AMERICAN ENVIRONMENT. CONSOLIDATED RURAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS SHOULD ENCOURAGE THE CONCEPT OF THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL AND DEVELOP CURRICULA WHICH WILL MEET THE NEEDS OF SPANISH AMERICAN RURAL YOUTH. THIS SPEECH WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1968, WASHINGTON, D. C., SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE U. S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, INTERIOR, AND LABOR, OEO, AND THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON YOUTH OPPORTUNITY. (ES)

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Lumberton, New Mexico--my home town--is somewhat typical of northern New Mexico villages. Located four miles from Dulce, seat of the Jicarilla Apache Reservation, Lumberton is composed of 350 Spanish-speaking residents (60 families), one service station, two grocery stores, and four bars, one of which has been owned and operated by my father since 1937. There is also a Roman Catholic Church. The old Lumberton school is gone, requiring the children to travel to Dulce for classes. There has never been a doctor, dentist, hospital, or clinic. Until early this year, all but ten of Lumberton's families had to haul their water four miles.

Nevertheless, modern American life has, recently, made some inroads in Lumberton through a volunteer fire department, a strengthened water association, and the Poverty Program: NYC and Headstart programs have been active, and two youngsters entered the Job Corps.

In spite of improvements in the consolidated Dulce School, little has been done to lower the drop-out rate among the Indian and Spanish-American young people.

Few students from Lumberton participate in sports or other extra-curricular activities--they don't identify with the school and the school does not really relate adequately to them or their environment. There is no organic relationship between them.

Stable jobs for adult men are rare--employment opportunities for youngsters are nonexistant. There simply is no institutional framework for youth development, and youngsters are seriously handicapped in acquiring rich, meaningful experience.

Geographic isolation, cultural factors (language, ethnicity, insensitivity of agencies), local economic depression, and out-migration to cities, combine to form a complexity of problems to be faced by rural youth in their progress toward maturity and adulthood.

Although income statistics frequently disguise the truth, the fact that one half (1/2) of all rural families in northern New Mexico, the Mississippi Delta, the Ozarks, and Appalachia have an income below $2,000 annually, is a meaningful statistic.

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Economics combined with isolation lend also to severe health problems among rural youth. For example: a group of 46 farmworker youngsters enrolled in a program at the University of Albuquerque have, according to the University, twice the incidence of chronic illness of any other comparable age group enrolled. Of 17 children in a rural child-care program in northern New Mexico, 14 had serious cases of strep throat. Lumberton, for example, is one hundred miles from the nearest hospital, and 40 miles from a doctor. Neither school systems nor parents have the resources to deal effectively with their children's serious health problems.

All the problems above mentioned are intensified when one views the migrant farmworker population--the poorest of all the poor, whether he be Mexican, Spanish-American, Negro or Indian.

Rural schools have not, for the most part, had the resources or creativity to develop programs designed to help rural minority youth relate to the greater American environment. Among many, language is a basic problem. School programs are often developed along urban lines, and simply do not relate to rural minority youth. It is vital that consolidated rural school systems work out programs and curricula which have meaning for their students; their own history and cultural background is only one area which should be emphasized. The concept of the community school should be strengthened and implemented in order to fulfill its real responsibility to rural America.

Housing is perhaps one of the greatest areas of concern for those serving the rural poor. Lack of adequate recreational facilities for young and old alike is something else that needs serious consideration.

Some of these shortages are being worked on through various agencies and legislation. The Farmer's Home Administration is beginning to have an impact in the housing area; NYC and Headstart are making some inroads. Elementary and Secondary Education Act Programs have devoted too much effort toward the acquisition of hardware and physical plant facilities.

It is, therefore, most important that the rural school system develop a broader concept of its role in the community, and provide new and meaningful experiences for their students, both in and out of the classroom.